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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 001598

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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Aftermath of Madrid Bombings

Key stories in the media:

With Yediot and Maariv devoting their entire front pages to the event, all media led with Sunday afternoon's double bombings at Ashdod Port, one of the most sensitive, strategic and heavily guarded locations in Israel. Ten Israelis were killed and 16 wounded, one critically. Hamas and Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades jointly claimed responsibility for the bombings. All media cited the beliefs of security officials that the two terrorists planned to launch a "mega-terrorist attack" by blowing themselves up near the port's bromine tanks. Leading media reported that the meeting between PM Sharon and Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei slated for Tuesday was subsequently canceled. Israel Radio reported that the preparatory meeting between the PMs' aides Dov Weisglass and Hassan Abu Libdeh was also called off. Leading media reported that the PA condemned the attacks, urged Israel to commit itself "to break the cycle of violence" and to implement the road map. Jerusalem Post reported that scores of Palestinians took to the streets in the Jenin and Jabaliya (Gaza Strip) refugee camps to "celebrate" the attacks. Leading media reported that Sunday IDF troops in the northern Gaza Strip shot dead three Palestinians near the border with Israel. Some media reported that the men were attempting to place a large bomb on the Karni-Netzarim road. Leading media also reported that 10 Palestinians and an IDF soldier were lightly wounded during an anti-fence demonstration near Modi'in Iliit.

Sunday, all media continued to lead with the aftermath of Thursday's Madrid bombings. They reported that the Spanish arrested three Moroccan and two Indian nationals in connection with the attacks, and that Al Qaida allegedly released a videotape claiming responsibility for the bombings. All media reported on last night's victory of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) over the Popular Party (PP) led by Mariano Rajoy, who the polls predicted would win the elections. The media pointed out that the conservative majority paid the price for Thursday's bombings in Madrid, which are thought to have been carried out by Al Qaida, and by the Spanish government's insistence that Basque separatists were behind the attacks. Yediot quoted Sharon as expressing his hope, at Sunday's cabinet meeting, that the world is awakening to terrorism and that it understands that everyone must join forces to fight it.

Ha'aretz quoted Secretary of State Colin Powell as saying Sunday in interviews with U.S. TV networks that Sharon's disengagement plan is "an interesting idea." The newspaper reported that Powell reiterated the United States' view that Israel should also withdraw from West Bank land. Hatzofe reported that Sunday the Council of Jewish Settlements on the Territories published a position paper -- "Enough With the Silence of the Lambs" -- that urges the right-wing ministers to voice their opposition to the disengagement plan publicly and at once.

On Sunday: Ha'aretz cited the USG's belief that Sharon's disengagement plan poses risks, but has "historic potential." The newspaper reported that at an "executive forum" with the senior members of his

administration, President Bush pushed for support for Sharon's plan, pending clarifications of details with Israel. (Yediot cited Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's belief that Bush would state his support for the disengagement plan in coming days.) Ha'aretz reported that senior Sharon aide Dov Weisglass will leave for Washington next week for a new round of talks with administration officials before Sharon's planned visit. Ha'aretz cited a statement released by Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu after his meeting with the U.S. envoys (Steve Hadley, Elliott Abrams and A/S William Burns) indicating that the nature and scope of guarantees and assistance to be provided by the U.S. remain unclear. Yediot quoted a Netanyahu associate as saying following the meeting: "The Americans will not give Sharon anything in exchange for the potentially disastrous plan. Ha'aretz quoted Mofaz as saying in Washington that the security model to be followed in the Gaza Strip is simple, since the region is surrounded by a fence, but that the situation in the West Bank is more complicated. Hatzofe reported that FM Silvan Shalom told Likud Central Committee members last Wednesday that a meeting between Sharon and Bush has been set, in principle, for March 29. Maariv reported that the PA has devised a plan for taking over the Gaza Strip after the IDF withdrawal, including the unification of the Palestinian security branches and the prevention of rocket firing at Israel; a campaign calling for law abiding; and cooperation with religious leaders

Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying Sunday that the PA has released four Palestinians from the Gaza Strip who were suspected of carrying out a deadly bombing of a U.S. diplomatic convoy on October 15.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post quoted Sharon as saying Sunday that Israel has no intention of allowing the burial in Ramallah of Palestinian Liberation Front leader Abu al-Abbas, who died in Iraq, contrary to PA Chairman Yasser Arafat's wish. Yediot reported that Balad Knesset Member Ahmed Bishara consoled Arafat over al-Abbas's death.

Sunday, all media reported on the Kurdish riots in the northern Syrian town of Qamishli. During the weekend, the media predicted a tight contest between Yossi Beilin and Meretz MK Ran Cohen for the leadership of the new left-wing party Yahad.

Sunday, Yediot cited the anger of Foreign Ministry officials over the fact that the former chief rabbis Mordechai Eliyahu and Yisrael Meir Lau were required to leave their fingerprints at the U.S. Embassy, even though they have diplomatic passports. The newspaper quoted U.S. embassy officials as saying that they regretted the imposition, but that they insisted that those were the regulations and noted that Rabbi Lau and former defense minister Moshe Arens had both gone to the embassy to be fingerprinted.

Sunday, Yediot quoted American sources as saying Saturday that U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer has recently expressed his dissatisfaction over the fact that IDF officers travel in Japanese or European cars, while the U.S. is transferring millions of dollars to Israel. The newspaper quoted GOI sources as saying that American cars are too big and American car manufacturers should make attractive bids to compete on the GOI market, "like everybody else."

Sunday, Ha'aretz cited the belief of Greek sources that Greece will allow armed Shin Bet personnel to guard Israel's delegation at the Athens Olympic Games. The assessment came after Greek media reported over the weekend that U.S. armed guards would be allowed to provide security for the American delegation at the Games.

Jerusalem Post reported that Sunday family members of the crew of the Columbia space shuttle that crashed last year arrived in Israel for a week-long visit.

Ha'aretz quoted officials at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles -- and Yediot sources at Israel's Consulate-General in Los Angeles -- as saying Sunday that California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger will be in Israel for the ground-breaking of the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem. Maariv reported that during his upcoming visit to Los Angeles, FM Silvan Shalom will finalize the details of Schwarzenegger's trip to Israel.

Leading media cited the results of a Tel Aviv University poll:
-Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that 56 percent

of Israelis support Sharon's disengagement plan.
(Yediot reported that the support rate in the survey was 68 percent.) Jerusalem Post reported that the support rate drops to 50 percent if it is contingent on dismantling settlements.
-60 percent support inclusion of "the larger, populated areas [settlements] of Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]" on the western part of the fence.
-71 percent object to the idea of building the fence on the Green Line.
-Only 24 percent of respondents state their absolute support for the Geneva Accord.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Current developments tend to support [a prediction] that the moment Israel evinced its readiness to carry out a unilateral withdrawal, the Palestinian organizations would make a concerted effort to show that Israel is retreating under military pressure."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "[Sharon] deserves credit for the very fact of raising the initiative, but he will pay a heavy political price if it turns out that he failed to carry it through."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz: "A party that believes in a peace agreement based on the 1967 borders will have a hard time explaining to its voters why it turned its back on a move that brings Israel closer to those very borders."

Block Quotes:

I. "Militants Want Israel to Retreat Under Fire"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 15): "Cooperation between Hamas and Fatah in an attack such as Sunday's strike at the Ashdod port, is nothing new. This operational cooperation has solidified over the past several weeks. For Hamas, the development is a major achievement: It has succeeded in building a kind of joint military apparatus with the Fatah establishment.... Current developments tend to support an assessment offered by Major General Aharon Zeevi (Farkash), head of Military Intelligence, who predicted that the moment Israel evinced its readiness to carry out a unilateral withdrawal, the Palestinian organizations would make a concerted effort to show that Israel is retreating under military pressure."

II. "Lost in the Mist"

Ha'aretz editorialized (March 15): "Ever since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced his dramatic initiative for a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the steps he is taking to implement his plan have been clouded in mist.... Sharon will be making a grave mistake by assuming he'll be able to bury the Gaza withdrawal plan and lay the blame for this at the feet of the other side. He deserves credit for the very fact of raising the initiative, but he will pay a heavy political price if it turns out that he failed to carry it through."

III. "Joining the Disengagement Government"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz (March 15): "There is only one political course of action worse than disengaging from territories in the Gaza Strip and West Bank without getting anything in return and without coordination with the Palestinian side -- not disengaging from the territories. There is only one political course of action worse than the Labor Party's support for Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan -- opposition to the plan.... A party that purports to fly the flag of peace cannot stand idly by when the prime minister needs its support for a peace initiative. A party that believes in a peace agreement based on the 1967 borders will have a hard time explaining to its voters why it turned its back on a move that brings Israel closer to those very borders."

IV. "Wandering in a Fog"

Correspondent Efraim Ganor wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely (March 14): "The unilateral disengagement plan's particulars are still

covered with ... fog. The U.S. is unable to define its attitude regarding it ... and [determine] the strong and the weak sides of the plan. It is unclear what the plan's completion would bring Israel, the Palestinians and the U.S.... Doubtfully, Sharon himself and his closest advisors have definite answers to these questions. In addition, the [Israeli] security forces have ... objections against the plan, arguing that in its present form, it cannot be executed without clear agreements with the Palestinians. ... Sharon sincerely tries to get his country and his people out of the old and bloody conflict with the Palestinians, and he is sure that Israel has to do it unilaterally as opposed to coordination with the Palestinians. Any agreement would force Israel make more significant concessions than those it is ready to carry out in a unilateral disengagement."

12. Aftermath of Madrid Bombings:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "U.S. President George W. Bush's demand that countries around the world take a stand and show who is in favor of wiping out terror is simplistic, yet just."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of Yediot Aharonot: "Even if it becomes evident that Al Qaida indeed bears full responsibility for the terrorism in Spain, on whom will the demonstrators vent their anger? You guessed correctly: on the United States, of course."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The longer Europe waits to join with America in common cause, the more the war will escalate and spread, including within Europe. The sooner Europe joins the fight, the sooner these massacres will end and the cause of freedom and human rights will prosper."

Block Quotes:

1I. "World at War"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 14): "Europe has been roused from its slumber. Terror is not limited to New York and Washington, Bali and Mombasa, Russia and Israel. Courting the favor of Arab and Muslim populations in whose name terror purports to strike -- even though this population has not authorized the terror -- will not tame the beast.... Judging by the response displayed by the Spanish people, Europeans are not showing a precious degree of unity and joining the alliance of victims being led by the Americans. Should terror not be vanquished in a long, hard struggle waged around the world, the way of life cherished by citizens of free states will be undermined. U.S. President George W. Bush's demand that countries around the world take a stand and show who is in favor of wiping out terror is simplistic, yet just."

II. "The Politics of Mourning"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of Yediot Aharonot (March 14): "According to the contemporary European cultural rulebook, the terrorism of the 21st century is nameless, faceless and without religious identity. Terrorism is repressed as an abstract threat or, at the very most, a threat that stems from age-old internal European conflicts. But to demonstrate explicitly against Islamic terror? To send millions into the street to that end? Heaven forbid. That is politically incorrect, unmulti-cultural and frightening. Mass anti-American demonstrations were a common feature of Western European cities throughout the duration of the Cold War. Not a single demonstration was held in them at the time against the USSR and the Soviet regime. This spectacle is now repeating itself in reference to radical Islam. The European code of conduct permits only demonstrations against imperialism, and not against Al Qaida. Therefore, even if it becomes evident that Al Qaida

indeed bears full responsibility for the terrorism in Spain, on whom will the demonstrators vent their anger? You guessed correctly: on the United States, of course."

III. "It's a World War"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 14): "From Bali, Casablanca, and Manhattan to Moscow, New Delhi, and Madrid, the evidence is too vast, clear, and appalling to ignore: the world is at war.... Spain and the rest of Europe must understand that, just like last century's threat to their future was fascism, this century it is the militant form of Islam, and that just like Nazism's in its time, the jihad's excuses for its mass-murders are not even worth a hearing. Europe must concede it is at war, and has no choice but to fight it until it is won. The jihadis see Europe and America as a common enemy against which they hope to play divide and conquer. The longer Europe waits to join with America in common cause, the more the war will escalate and spread, including within Europe. The sooner Europe joins the fight, the sooner these massacres will end and the cause of freedom and human rights will prosper."

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